

IDEAS AT *Work*

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

Good graphics program intimidates competitors

As the marketplace for personal computer programs matures, I've found that no matter what application you have in mind, the most expensive program is rarely the best one available. This is because another company usually comes along, thinks that the first is making a "killing" at the high price, and proceeds to offer a better program for less cost.

When it comes to graphics presentation programs, however, this has not yet happened. In this case, a program called VCN Concorde is so good, and has so many advanced features, that it probably intimidates potential competitors.

At \$695, VCN Concorde is the Cadillac model, and it's perfect for corporate environments where a wide variety of IBM PC "demos" or "slide shows" are needed — where a series of "slides" are presented on a computer screen, much as a slide show with a conventional slide projector. It also works on most PC-compatible computers. In either case, computers with high-resolution color graphics monitors are the best.

The key question is, "Is it worth it?" In my opinion, yes, assuming that it will be used on a regular basis. Here's why:

✓ Not only does the program allow you to easily prepare a slide show with your own text and color graphics, but a library of more than 2,000 graphic images is available to choose from. With relative ease, for example, you can superimpose your text on top of drawings that relate to your subject.

✓ Graphs can be presented in virtually any format you desire — bars, lines, pies, three-dimensional, in any combination of colors you choose. Data can be imported from Lotus 1-2-3, which could eliminate the rekeying of a lot of data and also eliminate the errors that often creep in when rekeying is done.

✓ A number of animated sequences are available for adding interest and action to your slide presentation. While this may seem like a superfluous addition, it can

make a big difference in a presentation's overall effectiveness.

✓ Finally, advanced users can use VCN Concorde to set up self-paced presentations or self-teaching courses where the viewer enters responses after each slide, which determine the sequence of

the upcoming slides. Thus, you can create menus that give a wide variety of choices to your viewer, allowing the presentation to be customized for his or her needs.

All this, combined with a number of other fancy features, make VCN a very attractive package.

On the other hand, other than its high price, there are two negative features that should be considered before buying the package for your office.

First, it's not easy to "casually" operate the system. It takes a significant investment of time to learn the intricacies of VCN Concorde in order to use it effectively. Otherwise, not only can a lot of executive time be wasted, but the result will look amateurish. It's best to designate a particular individual to study up on the program, practice using all the features, and handle the actual preparation of presentations for everyone else in your office.

Secondly, from my own experience, the system works best for single viewers or small groups of viewers who can watch the presentation directly on a computer screen. Once you begin fooling with video projection systems, photographing the screen to make slides to show on a projector, or creating output on a color printer to convert to slides, the entire process begins to lose cost effectiveness — and look less professional — compared with commercially prepared slides. So, for the kinds of situations that can make effective use of the program — mainly in companies that prepare lots of presentations for small groups of viewers — it's a real winner, and could probably save much more than its cost in the long run.



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